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SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST PEACE: FRENCH MFA ON SARKOZY-MUBARAK
LETTER TO OBAMA

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen H. Allegrone, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: French MFA Middle East Director Patrice Paoli told Political Minister Counselor August 11 that the French await a response to the letter sent August 6 by Presidents Sarkozy and Mubarak to President Obama, calling for a Middle East peace summit this autumn. "We don't necessarily expect a yes or no answer," Paoli said, "but rather an explanation as to how we can work together." (See paragraph 6 for a summary of the letter's key elements.) The GOF worries that negotiations toward a Middle East peace agreement have recently focused too much on "Israel versus America," thus isolating the USG. Paoli said the French want to show solidarity. At the same time, he advocated vehemently for immediate USG action to press negotiations forward. He and the MFA Israel Desk Officer delineated the risks of delayed action, including the benefits accruing to Iran. As to the action proposed -- a peace summit -- Paoli explained that practical reasons motivated Sarkozy and Mubarak to mention the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in their letter to President Obama. The French and the Egyptians do not necessarily envisage including all 43 members of the UfM in the summit, Paoli acknowledged, and he said they will support any format or approach that pushes negotiations forward. Nonetheless, he argued that Sarkozy and Mubarak can shape the UfM agenda in their capacity as rotating UfM Co-Presidents, and the UfM has already brought all the parties to the conflict together. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Paoli argued that the Sarkozy-Mubarak letter poses an answer to the outstanding question of the Middle East peace process: "How do we move forward?" The French reply: "We move together." Indeed, the GOF worries that negotiations have recently focused too much on "Israel versus America," thus isolating the USG. Paoli said that President Obama has taken a significant political risk by urging Israel to freeze all settlement activity, and he said the French want to show solidarity. "We are at your disposal," Paoli declared. The GOF seeks to find a practical but politically appropriate approach to negotiations, he explained, with a particular stress on implementation and monitoring mechanisms whose absence weakened previous agreements. Paoli insisted, however, that the GOF does not want to undermine USG efforts, especially since the U.S. currently enjoys "an international credibility that was missing under President Bush." Rather, the French aim to make a constructive contribution. "Essentially," he admitted, "we don't want to be spectators."

¶3. (C) Paoli also advocated vehemently for immediate USG action to press negotiations forward. Senator Mitchell's experience in Northern Ireland taught him that negotiations take time, Paoli argued, "but here we don't have time." He claimed that Mubarak agreed with this assessment during his July meeting with Sarkozy. Paoli then delineated the risks of delayed action: nothing will happen if we leave it to the parties to the conflict; Gaza could "explode again" at any

moment; and only extremists benefit from our hesitation. Paoli also claimed rapid action could help us to resolve the impasse over on-going Israeli settlement construction: "If we're able to de-limit quickly where Israel can build and where it cannot, we can defuse that element of the conflict."

As to the location of the peace summit that would take these steps, Paoli maintained that the French remain indifferent. (NOTE: The Sarkozy-Mubarak letter proposed "Egypt and Paris" as possible sites for the summit. END NOTE.)

¶4. (S) Furthermore, a lack of progress in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations by September will strengthen Iran's hand at the UN General Assembly meetings, according to MFA Israel Desk Officer Frederick Berezyiat. Berezyiat told poloff August 14 that French officials are currently deliberating how to isolate Iran politically, not just economically. "If we can pronounce some form of progress or plans on the peace process in September," Berezyiat said, "we will weaken the Iranian claim to be the most effective defenders of the Palestinians." Most importantly, he added, the French believe an announcement of progress or plans will undermine the assertion by Iran, Hamas and Hizbollah that negotiations never achieve anything for the Palestinians.

¶5. (C) Paoli explained that practical reasons motivated Sarkozy and Mubarak to mention the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in their letter to President Obama: Sarkozy and Mubarak can shape the UfM agenda in their capacity as rotating UfM Co-Presidents, and the UfM has already brought together the parties to the conflict. The French and the Egyptians do not necessarily envisage including all 43 members (EU and Mediterranean littoral

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states) of the UfM in a Middle East peace summit, Paoli acknowledged. "We are open as to format, but Sarkozy and Mubarak are currently leading the UfM and we can benefit from this framework." Most importantly, he stressed, the UfM is the only international organization that managed to persuade former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Syrian President Assad to appear together at its launch in July 2008. Thus the UfM has already proved successful, Paoli claimed, citing two subsequent meetings in the past year -- in Marseille and then in Paris on July 12, 2009, where all UfM members met at a senior level. He noted that these meetings have included representatives of Arab states and Israel, and that Arab members of the UfM even accepted a Deputy Secretary General role for Israel. (NOTE: The UfM working groups reportedly froze their work for a period following the December-January war in Gaza. END NOTE.)

¶6. (C) Below are key elements of the August 6 Sarkozy-Mubarak letter to President Obama:

-- Time plays against the architects of peace and favors the extremists:

- Settlement expansion is rendering a Palestinian state less and less viable
- The end of President Abbas's mandate may weaken the Palestinian Authority
- The blockade of Gaza punishes the population and strengthens the extremists

-- Previous efforts, in particular at Camp David, Taba and Annapolis, were not in vain; they identified the parameters of a just, global and durable settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

-- The Arab peace initiative opens the possibility of a complete normalization of relations of Arab and Muslim nations with Israel in exchange for the creation of a Palestinian state.

-- The goal is known and the path is lit. We must now act quickly to succeed quickly.

-- As co-presidents of the Union for the Mediterranean, we wish to organize this autumn, in coordination with your efforts to re-launch the peace process in the region, a summit in Egypt or in Paris of the UfM members. In addition to these 43 countries, we would also invite Arab countries not situated on the Mediterranean and the Quartet.

-- This summit will have as its objective to create a dynamic. The parties will not alone achieve an agreement. The international community must help them to succeed.

-- This summit will also offer impetus to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process. The parallel re-launching of these discussions will reinforce the Palestinian track and contribute to creating a movement in the direction of peace throughout the Middle East.

-- The risk of waiting is greater than the risk of failure.

-- The role of the U.S. is critical for success. We are convinced that American support will be decisive for the success of this initiative and in order for a peace agreement to be concluded.

PEKALA